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ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGIAL COACHING
AS A MEANS TO FOSTER IMPROVEMENT
IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

MA Thesis

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, effective collaboration skills play a crucial role in all disciplines, especially in the field of education. In order to promote collaboration, become a self-reflective and self-directed teacher as well as develop professionally, a useful strategy to be practised with teachers is collegial coaching. The main purpose of the present thesis is to examine what teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching before and after participating in the peer observation process are. For that, a small-scale action research was carried out among 4 female English teachers in one school in Lääne-Virumaa County in Estonia and data was analysed following the principles of inductive content analysis. The results of the survey show how teachers' perceptions changed after experiencing the peer observation process and whether the process improved their instructional practice and supported their professional growth.

The present thesis falls into an introduction, two core chapters and a conclusion. The introduction of the paper defines the meaning of collegial coaching and focuses on previous research in the field. The first chapter gives an overview of the concept of collegial coaching, explains the ways how to implement the latter in the school context, explores various observation instruments that can be used during the observation process and discusses the areas of concern that may hinder the whole process to be effective.

The second chapter introduces the sample, methodology and procedure of the present thesis, provides the results of the findings of the two research questions and discusses the most relevant matters regarding the findings of the survey in connection with previous studies.

The conclusion summarises the two chapters presented in the paper, focuses on the major findings of the survey as well as limitations and practical value of the current thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher in the 21st century is a challenging profession requiring constant self-improvement, self-assessment as well as collaboration with colleagues. The three aforementioned elements play a crucial role in teacher's personal growth. In order to support and promote the latter, a time-consuming yet productive way is to practise teacher observation, which can be conducted either using a top-down or bottom-up approach where the former refers to the situation where classroom visitations are carried out by the school administration or inspectors, whereas the latter focuses on the procedure where peers sharing the same status exchange peer observation services (Lasagabaster & Sierra 2011). Gosling (2002) distinguishes three models of peer observation of teaching (POT) – an evaluation model, a development model and a peer review model. The first two models can be categorised under the top-down approach being judgmental with an outcome of a report, whereas the last model as the bottom-up way of observation serves the purpose of self and mutual reflection being confidential in nature. With the bottom-up approach in mind, the present thesis focuses on the concept of collegial coaching, its peculiarities, ways of implementation as well as shortcomings.

According to Berg and Thijs (2002: 55), collegial coaching, peer observation or peer review is “a confidential relationship between professional colleagues working together to reflect on their teaching and share ideas in order to improve their professional skills”. Slater and Simmons (2001: 68) describe collegial coaching as a system where “professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas, teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace”. Roberson and Franchini (2008: 4) determine a peer as “a colleague who does not

have administrative authority above you and who “may or may not be your mentor”. A peer-coach, as Murray (2010: 7) defines, is a “partner who offers constructive criticism in a non-judgmental way”. Knight (2007) emphasises the fact that an ideal coach owns a capacity to listen, perform classroom observations and communicate skilfully. In addition to aforementioned characteristics, a good coach is aware of the fact that a trustful relationship can only occur without constant interruption of an instructor. Furthermore, Vidmar (2006: 141) adds that it is observer’s responsibility to “build trust through on-going conversations that encourage instructors to speak openly about their practice in the classroom”. Instructor’s obligation, on the contrary, is to introduce the coach his/her aims, objectives, activities that are planned to be carried out among students and intended learning outcomes prior the lesson (Malu 2015).

After the classroom observation, however, the instructor will analyse the lesson reflecting upon the latter. It is important to note that “the coach works within the parameter set by the instructor to promote conscious, self-directed learning and discovery” (Vidmar 2006: 142). In other words, collegial coaching aims at promoting trusting collaboration among peers with a concentration on assessing one’s teaching effectiveness as well as improving one’s professional practice through constructive feedback bearing in mind the equality principle among peers. Murray (2010: 4) emphasises the importance of interaction among peers, referring to collegial cooperation through which “teachers become more assertive and decisive about their personal learning.” Moreover, collaboration also helps teachers raise their self-esteem and self-confidence in order to face challenges in their teaching practice. In addition to that, the impact on one’s self-development is not unilateral; on the contrary, the observed teacher (an instructor) and the observer (a coach) both learn from one another (Vidmar 2006).

Most of the research on collegial coaching has focused on peer observation in higher education context (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005, Donnelly 2007, Hişmanoğlu & Hişmanoğlu 2010, Lasagabaster & Sierra 2011, Castañeda-Londoño 2017), some, however, in the school setting (Arredondo & Delany 1998, Shields 2007, Lasagabaster & Sierra 2011). Donnelly's (2007) research focused on a detailed qualitative study among 90 participants' evaluations on peer-observation of teaching scheme for academic staff in higher education, which showed collegial coaching in a positive light in the sense that the participants found it to be a useful practice, which would eventually lead to professional development. Castañeda-Londoño's (2017) small-scale action research revealed 3 university lecturers' perceptions about collegial coaching before and after participating in classroom observation. The findings of the survey showed that practicing peer observation had several positive outcomes, one of which was the fact that it "was enriching the teacher's own views of the classroom practices with an outsider's perspective" (Castañeda-Londoño 2017: 82). Arredondo and Delany's (1998) qualitative survey among 6 basic school teachers who were introduced collegial coaching principles as well as trained using the latter beforehand revealed that the participants "made changes in their instructional practices as a result of the collegial coaching and reflective practice". Shields' (2007) case study of peer coaching among 12 elementary school educators not only supports Arredondo and Delany's findings but also gives an in-depth overview of the aspects that affect peer coaching, its characteristics and the outcomes of peer coaching. According to Shields (2007:57), the variables that can affect the outcome of collegial coaching are trust, commitment, administrative support, non-threatening environment, time constraints and teacher attributes. The findings of Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2011) research of 185 infant, junior, secondary, university, and private language school

teachers show that the majority of participants have generally a positive view regarding peer observation as teachers' positive attitudes outweighed negative feelings towards the process of observation. Based on Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond's (2005) study among 18 university lecturers, peer review was mostly approved by the participants although peer observation as a professional development strategy received some negative criticism as well. The area of concern was namely the procedure of giving and receiving feedback. To be more exact, lecturers were anxious about providing a colleague with feedback, as they did not know how the observee was going to receive the latter. In addition to that, gaining constructive feedback was seen in a negative light, i.e the latter was received "as criticism rather than a developmental issue" (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005: 218).

The effectiveness of peer observation has also been studied by Dos Santos (2017), whose findings show that if the latter is well organised, teachers will be eager to participate in the process. However, as for the negative aspects, in addition to time constraints, observer's subjective approach to the process was reproached. Namely, the findings show that observers tend to conduct observations not from their objective perspective but subjective instead (Dos Santos 2017). In addition to the surveys discussed above, Day's (2013) study reveals that practicing peer observation in an ELT practicum for graduate students not only improved students' reflective skills but enhanced their teaching practice and helped them become reflective teachers. Day's (2013) findings are of great importance as they show that "what students do in their practicum may have long-term implications for their professional growth and development" (Day 2013:7). Derived from the aspects discussed beforehand, it can be assumed that the earlier collegial coaching is practised among pre-service teachers, the better results in professional growth may emerge when being already an in-service teacher.

Clegg et al (2002: 131) claim that “reflective practice is becoming the favoured paradigm for continuing professional development in higher education”. Thus, peer observation is widely practised in higher educational institutions in the USA, Britain, Australia as well as China (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005, Liu 2006, Huston & Weaver 2007, Dos Santos 2017). The idea of practising collegial coaching among lecturers and teachers is also welcomed in Estonia. According to Noorma (2015), the aim of the University of Tartu is to establish the culture of productive peer-to-peer observation as well as promote collegial collaboration in order to enhance lecturers’ teaching practices and their awareness of the student learning experience. However, it is not only the University of Tartu where peer coaching is promoted but various schools (e.g. Tartu Forselius School, Tartu Hansa School and Kristjan Jaak Petersoni Gymnasium in Tartu etc.) practise the latter as well. To be more exact, teachers are obliged to observe a certain number of fellow teachers’ lessons within a school year and provide colleagues with constructive feedback. All things considered, the author of the present thesis believes collegial coaching to be an important matter not only at the university level but in the school context as well.

The present paper concentrates on practising collegial coaching in the school setting in Estonia, namely in one school in Lääne-Virumaa County.

The goal of the present thesis is to identify English teachers’ perceptions of collegial coaching as a means to support one’s professional teaching practice. The thesis is aimed at answering the following research questions:

- 1) What are English teachers’ perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation?
- 2) What are English teachers’ perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating

in the peer observation process?

The present thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter provides background information about the essence of collegial coaching, explains the process of peer observation, the relevance and benefits of using the latter among teachers, introduces observation tools and guidelines for organising and implementing the latter in the school setting as well as discusses the concerns associated with the use of peer coaching. The second chapter focuses on the empirical part of the thesis providing the research questions, introducing the sample, the setting and the research instruments and discussing the procedure of the study. The results of the research are analysed and compared to earlier surveys. Additionally, there are two appendices, the first of which provides guidelines for peer observation, whereas the second one presents the questions for the group and peer interviews. In sum, the present thesis holds a practical purpose to contribute to teachers' professional development through reciprocal learning and support.

CHAPTER I

The present chapter gives an overview of the essence of collegial coaching, explains the ways how to implement the latter in the school setting, introduces observation tools that can be used during the observation process as well as focuses on the pitfalls regarding the practice of coaching.

1.1. Collegial coaching as a strategy for personal development

To begin with, according to Murray (2010: 3), “many English language teaching experts believe that on-going professional development is essential, especially in today’s world of constantly changing technology”. In other words, in order to be able to cope in the world of education, it is vital to focus on constant self-improvement. Murray (2010) claims that teachers working in isolation on a daily basis without receiving any support neither from the school administration nor their colleagues is a major problem, which may eventually lead to frustration in the field of teaching. Moreover, professional loneliness and isolation may result in feeling burnout and eventually quitting the profession (Ali Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikahmadi 2016). Murray (2010:3) emphasises the importance of collegial collaboration, which enables teachers to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences with each other as it “can help a teacher gain a sense of community and belonging”. Furthermore, collegial collaboration enables to “make teaching more public and less of a private activity” (Gosling 2002: 3). In order to reduce the problem of isolation, a simple yet productive way is to practise peer observation as a professional development activity, which aims at promoting collegiality, offers opportunities to analyse the process of teaching and the effectiveness of strategies used in teaching. In accordance with Murray’s views, Joice and Showers (2002) also point out that

the three characteristics to enhance teacher's pedagogical improvement are observation, feedback and practice. Furthermore, informative constructive feedback and "reflection can help a teacher develop a greater awareness of his or her own teaching as well as a better understanding of student learning" (Murray 2010: 3). Previous studies in the field of collegial collaboration (Goddard & Goddard 2007, Supovitz et al 2010) also highlight that the latter has a significant impact on student learning. Therefore, the more teachers' professional knowledge, experiences and pedagogical skills improve, the more likely are the students' achievements to grow.

Collegial coaching as a strategy for professional development in teaching is often confused with teacher evaluation. The latter, however, has completely different foci. To be more exact, teacher evaluation focuses on assessing teachers' professionalism and effectiveness and is carried out by school administration, whereas peer observation aims at fostering improvement in one's pedagogical practice, is conducted by colleagues themselves and is formative in nature (Roberson & Franchini 2008). The latter, however, differs from summative evaluation to a great deal as formative approach focuses on instructor's personal goals and objectives. In addition to that, an important matter about the concept of collegial coaching is the fact that it is a reciprocal process, i.e. colleagues are not only equal partners in a way that nobody acts as a mentor but the conversations held after the peer observation process should be beneficial for both parties. Judging from the latter, reciprocal peer coaching incorporates the process of "observation, reflection, the exchange of professional ideas and shared problem-solving" that all affect peers' professional development (Zwart et al 2007). Furthermore, peers should feel comfortable around each other's company and for that the environment for the whole process must be non-threatening and convenient enough (Stillwell

2009). As the main purpose of peer observation is to pursue professional development, the essential role of the whole process is on peer discussions. Vidmar (2006: 136) states that “as instructors reflect upon their experience in the classroom with a colleague, they discover important information about the intended results in comparison with the actual lesson”. The latter, however, is the key to the whole progress. Vidmar (2006: 137) holds the view that “formative assessment promotes progress toward specific objectives that originate from the instructor.” Furthermore, in order to develop professionally, the main goal is to bring about changes in teachers’ instructional practice.

1.2. The implementation of peer observation

While choosing a peer for the peer observation process, it is important to note that one can choose the latter either in his/her own subject section or in another one, depending what the objectives of the assessment are. The former version is definitely more subject-centred or “content-dependent”, whereas the latter has a more general aim with the focus on “broader teaching concerns” like classroom management, engagement of students, teacher-student interaction etc. (Roberson & Franchini 2008: 4).

In order to ease nervousness and overcome anxiety regarding the process of collegial coaching, several authors (Brookfield 1995, Farrell 2004, Roberson & Franchini 2008) have suggested the concept of so-called conversation circle where the aim is to not only connect with each other but listen to and understand a colleague. According to Brookfield (1995), it would be advisable for the participants to begin the peer observation process with a brief introspection. In other words, peers should share their thoughts and ideas about their teaching and them being teachers in order to examine each other’s visions as well as beliefs better. For

that, Brookfield (1995) suggests the following questions:

- What am I most proud of as an instructor?
- What would I like my students to say about me after class?
- What do I worry about most in my work as an instructor?
- How do I know when I have taught well?
- What do I most need to learn about or improve in my teaching?
- What mistakes have I learned the most from as an instructor?

In addition to Brookfield (1995), Farrell's (2004) questions serve the same purpose, i.e. to take a glimpse at the instructor's understanding of his/her teaching by promoting self-inquiry. Farrell (2004) calls such an approach "reflective breaks", offering questions as follows:

- What is the best aspect of your life as an instructor?
- What is the worst aspect of your life as an instructor?
- Do you spend much time thinking about new ideas or methods for teaching your classes?
- Do you discuss teaching with your colleagues informally such as in the staff room or meeting?
- Do you ever ask a colleague to watch you teach beyond a periodical colleague evaluation?
- Are there things you would like to change about your teaching?
- What have you learned about yourself so far?

The questions as the ones presented above are to lessen nervousness and tension among colleagues and to create a non-judgmental environment for collaborative teaching.

A common peer observation process takes place among two colleagues, whereas even a more productive way is a three-person group where the roles of a coach, an instructor and an observer are exchanged in turns (Vidmar 2006, Stillwell 2009). The role of the observer is not to act as a mentor but keep an eye on the whole collegial coaching process and in case of need (e.g. if a coach somewhat starts to criticise or correct the instructor) intervene in order to ensure the non-judgmental environment. Moreover, taking notes by the observer during the

peer discussion is welcomed as well, as these can be shared with the instructor afterwards as they might include valuable information for personal improvement (Stillwell 2009).

The planning conference is necessary for clarifications; i.e. instructors not only introduce their aims and objectives to the coach, but explain how students will achieve the latter as well. Furthermore, the pre-meeting conference allows the instructor to discuss “specific concerns” regarding their teaching and concentrate on “strategies to address those concerns” (Vidmar 2006: 143). The latter, however, enables either the coach or the observer to focus on the problematic areas during the observation process and inquire the concerns afterwards during the post-meeting conference.

The implementation of reflective collegial coaching is not an easy task, as it “requires some practice to gain facility with the various roles” (Vidmar 2006: 143). In order to overcome the obstacles that may occur during the whole process, a list of sample questions would be of great help. Some sample questions that can be used in the pre-meeting phase are according to Costa and Garmston (1994) as follows:

- What is the session going to be about?
- As you teach, what will the students do?
- What would you like students to take from the session?
- What will you do to achieve your intended outcomes?

Besides the questions above, Roberson and Franchini (2008) suggest a number of questions to be used during the pre-meeting session:

- What are your objectives for the students in the activity being observed? (What changes do you want students to undergo? What skills, knowledge, and perspectives will they be developing?)
- What will be your role (your own function) in the process?
- What have you chosen to do (and how does this choice connect to your objective and role)? What are your expectations for what students will actually do, and for what will actually happen in the classroom?
- How will you know if you have been successful?
- What are the specific goals of this class meeting?

- What have the students done to prepare for this class?
- What will you do in class? What methods and strategies will you use?
- What would you like for me to focus on when I observe? How would you like to receive feedback from me? (i.e., What kind of observation instrument would you prefer that I use?)

Open-ended questions as the ones presented above not only encourage instructors to talk about their intentions and issues regarding their teaching, but create a trusting foundation for further discussions as well. In addition to that, Vidmar (2006: 144) emphasises the fact that coaches “should acknowledge the speaker by using positive nonverbal responses such as nodding, smiling, or leaning forward”, which send out positive signals and build trust. In case of clarifications, Vidmar (2006: 144) suggests questions and sentences as “Am I understanding this correctly?” or “Let me make sure I understand what you are getting at.”, whereas for the discussions in order to further the conversation he offers examples as “Tell me more about...” or “Could you elaborate on...”. In addition to the information presented above, it is important to note that during the pre-conference meeting, an observer and an observee settle on the observation tool that is going to be used and the type of feedback the coach will provide the instructor (Roberson & Frachini 2008).

In order to avoid discomfort and tension as well as encourage colleagues to communicate during the reflective conference, Costa and Garmston (1994) suggest some open-ended questions as follows:

- How do you think the class went?
- What were your students doing or saying to indicate how the class went?
- How did what you actually do in class compared to what you had planned?
- Did the students achieve the goals and objectives/outcomes you set for them?
- Was there any part of the session that you changed? Why did you make the change?
- Did all students perform as planned? If not, why do you think some students performed as planned and others did not?
- What did you do to produce the results you wanted?
- What new ideas or insights did you discover about your teaching?

- As you plan future sessions, what ideas could be carried over and used?
- What has the coaching/evaluation session done for you? What would you have liked to see happen in the coaching process? What could your coach do differently in future peer conferences?

In addition to the questions above, Malu (2015: 23) suggests the following questions to begin a conversation with when starting the pre-conference meeting as “these questions enable teachers to focus on the positives and prompt them to be reflective”:

- What did you like about your lesson?
- What worked for you?
- If you speak with your family tonight, what will you say went well in this lesson?

Roberson and Franchini (2008), however, advise to use questions as follows:

- How did you feel about the class?
- Was it a typical class?
- Were the objectives reached?
- What went well? What would you have liked to improve?

The instructor’s focal point is to assess whether the aims and objectives set prior the lesson were accomplished and in case of failure analyse the reasons that had hindered the latter. Brookfield (1995) refers to such incidents as “critical incidents” which actually set the groundwork for deeper self-inquiry. To be more exact, mistakes or incidents as such enable instructors to learn from them as well as make improvements in their teaching practice.

Both, the pre-meeting conference and the follow-up discussion could approximately last for 10 till 30 minutes. The timing when to provide the peer-coached teacher with feedback is discussed by several researchers. Stoller (2003), for instance, suggests having a follow-up conference shortly after the classroom visit, whereas Ali (2007) and Roberson and Franchini (2008) advocate for a longer period of time, referring to an instructor’s need to reflect upon his/her lesson before the post-meeting conference. Nevertheless, the question of when is not that important as the question of receiving valuable and candid feedback, which has an impact

on teacher improvement. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005: 214) emphasise the importance of the coach's ability to stay objective during the feedback highlighting the fact that the whole process should affect the instructor's "future thinking and practice" in a positive way. It is important to note that the observed teachers should have time to analyse the lesson being taught before the coach starts presenting data gathered as well as recorded on the tool during the observation process (Malu 2015). Roberson and Franchini (2008) suggest the following questions for the self-analysis:

- What went well?
- Where did your students seem to respond positively to what you were doing?
- Where do you see evidence that you met your objectives for the class meeting?
- What do you wish had worked better?

According to Vidmar (2006:146), the coach's role is to act as an "active listener who encourages the instructor to explore and elaborate on what actually occurred in the classroom", whereas the third-person observer's task is to not only monitor the coach, but "note any thought-provoking comments that could be shared and further explored by the group". The coach's focal point should address the issues that were successful in the lesson. For that, Malu (2015) suggests using a building metaphor where each brick used in construction represents some sort of improvement. From Malu's (2015: 23) point of view, coaches could use sentences as "I think you handled [this teaching event] well. What would you like to work on next?" where the former question recognises the instructor, whereas the latter furthers the discussion by letting the teacher focus on his/her teaching practice in a more detailed way. All in all, it is important to note that in order to become proficient enough in reflecting on one's teaching, the latter must be trained in teacher education programmes (Gün 2011). According to Gün (2011:126), the best results occur when "teachers are also provided with focused input sessions related to reflecting on different aspects of their classroom

teaching as well as having the opportunity to watch sides of themselves teaching”.

As discussed above, coaching a colleague is a rather delicate task as any kind of nonverbal reaction (e.g. a frown or a questioning look), a verbal comment (e.g. if a coach suddenly takes a role of a mentor and starts solving instructor’s problematic issues) or some sort of restless movement or behaviour is a clear signal to the instructor that the coach is not content with something or he/she has done something wrong. Such almost invisible signs have the power to ruin the trust between the coach and the instructor. Furthermore, the latter may affect instructor’s self-esteem and in the end have a negative effect on the whole process - to improve one’s professional practice (Ellison & Hays 2003). The coach must not forget that the primary focus is on the instructor and his/her ability to analyse the pros and cons of the lesson and offer solutions if needed. For this reason, Vidmar (2006: 146) highlights the beneficial side of the three-person collegial coaching groups as the observer in the team notes down “any irregularities in the interaction between the coach and the instructor”.

In conclusion, peer observation is not an one-time activity, but a long process. Only through practice can the coach become proficient enough to avoid such mistakes as presented above.

1.3. Observation tools

Malu (2015: 21) promotes the view that besides the objectives and goals set by the instructor during the pre-meeting conference as well as “challenges that the teacher wants the observer to focus on – the kind of evidence the teacher would like recorded”, one should also agree upon the observation tool or instrument that is going to be used during the classroom visit. Malu (2015: 14) advises to use observation tools in order to take notes about the class

being observed as “evidence-based feedback is particularly useful”. In addition to that, Salas and Mercado (2010: 20) emphasise the importance of the latter encouraging peers to “talk across the data” during post-conference meetings implying that such an approach would serve a more meaningful effect on teachers’ professional growth. Roberson and Franchini (2008) add that in addition to using a suitable tool, an observer should also write down all the questions that emerge during the observation process to be discussed afterwards during the post-conference meeting (e.g. Why did you choose to use that particular strategy?).

To begin with, there are a number of various instruments for collecting data during the observation process some of which are more prescriptive and restrictive in nature than others. However, eventually they all serve the same purpose – to collect the necessary information about the lesson the instructor and the coach had agreed upon. The most commonly used tool to collect data about the class being observed is a checklist (see Appendix 1), which is considered especially effective during the first observation process as it allows “to identify potential reasons for why a given instructor is effective or not” (Roberson & Franchini 2008: 24). In other words, checklists are the kind of observation forms, which allow the observer to focus on a wide range of aspects of the instructor’s lesson. In addition to checklists, descriptive narratives can serve the same function as the checklists, i.e. to give a written overview of the main aspects of the lesson. However, if the instructor prefers the coach to focus on a particular aspect of the lesson, instruments, which allow a more in-depth approach, come in handy. Written descriptive narratives, in this sense, provide an opportunity to not only focus on many nuances of the lesson, but one single aspect as well (Lockhart & Richards 1992).

Malu (2015) introduces two effective observation tools that can be used during the

peer-observation process in order to collect data about the lesson - the T –chart tool and the seating chart tool. The former is to mark teacher- and student-talking time by recording utterances using tally marks, whereas the latter aims to “record teacher and student questions and answers and what the teacher does during student pair work” (Malu 2015: 18). Both tools provide the instructor with valuable evidence regarding his/her lesson. In case of T-chart (Figure 1), the clear picture of teacher-talking time and student-talking time will lay the groundwork for further discussions on the subject.

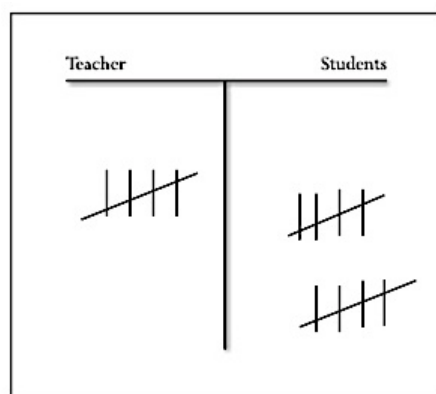


Figure 1. T-Chart instrument

The teacher being peer-coached can reflect upon his/her teaching by analysing whether, for example, the excessive teacher-talking time in the particular lesson served its purpose or, on the contrary, limited the amount of student talking time.

In the same vein, the seating chart tool (Figure 2) can reveal the instructor “the gender of those who speak and are spoken to, their location in the classroom” as well as interaction (i.e. answering or asking questions) between the teacher and the students. When drawing a T-chart may just take a couple of seconds, creating a seat chart requires more time and may last for several minutes. For this reason, it is advisable for the instructor to draw a seating plan in advance and give it to the coach before the observation process. A seat chart is simply

explained a classroom plan which identifies the location of the teacher's desk, the students' desks, the whiteboard/chalkboard and/or other furniture if necessary. The location of the furniture is marked with rectangles and coded with capital letters where letter T stands for a teacher, whereas letters B and G represent either a boy's or a girl's desk. In order to gather data, a coach has to put a tally mark in a student's box who is being "asked, listened to or called on" by the teacher during pair work. As for the students' questions, a question mark should be put in the student's box who addresses a question to the teacher (Malu 2015:19).

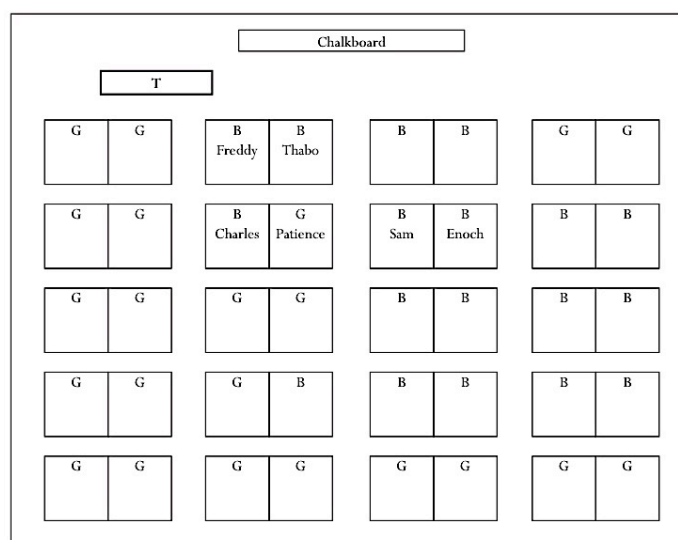


Figure 2. Seat chart instrument.

Techniques as the ones described above, play an important role in teacher's professional improvement as the information in them has the power to promote teacher development. Malu (2015: 23) states that "when the tools are adapted to particular needs and settings, they will be useful and meaningful, allowing observers to gather the most relevant data that will help answer questions that can prompt development and growth in teaching". The author compares an observer to a guest who has received an invitation from the instructor to visit his/her class with the aim to provide the teacher with honest and open feedback to foster improvement in

the observee's pedagogical practice. Indeed, tools as the ones presented above are of great help when dealing with lesson observation and “can be used in English-language classrooms and across content areas, making them valuable in interdisciplinary professional-development settings” (Malu: 2015: 24).

1.4. The pitfalls of observation and how to overcome them

Although many researchers show collegial coaching as a strategy in a positive light, there are still several drawbacks. According to Richards and Farrell (2005), the negative aspects of the latter are that it is too subjective, intimidating and prescriptive. As for intimidation, research shows that lesson observations conducted by school authority “induce anxiety” (Crookes 2003: 29). However, several researchers (Gebhard & Oprandy 1999, Aubusson et al. 2007, Borich 2008) claim that the process of being observed by a colleague also causes anxiety, nervousness, fear and stress among a number of teachers, even of those who have more than 10 years of teaching experience. The reason of the latter lies in the matter that teachers are intimidated by the fact that in the observer's opinion they might not be competent enough in their teaching (Borich 2008).

Besides the anxiety and fear, another area of concern is the matter that coach's viewpoints and understandings about teaching may differ from the instructor's beliefs to a great extent. Roberson and Franchini (2008: 5) claim that “it may be difficult for even a well-intentioned observer to filter out his/her own bias against a given teaching method or personality while conducting an observation”. Indeed, for the coach whose principles are in favour of classical and conservative teaching strategies, the practice of active learning techniques might seem as chaos in the classroom. For the reason above, Roberson and

Franchini (2008) suggest using several peers for coaching, as it will provide the instructor with multiple perspectives on his/her teaching.

In addition to the concerns discussed above, another shortcoming is that if colleagues observe each other and the process turns out to be judgmental and evaluative, it may eventually have a negative impact on the relationship between peers. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005: 222) argue that the reason why providing a peer with candid feedback may cause difficulties at times results from the matter that participants lack directions, meaningful language and clarity about “what the process is trying to achieve”. The implementation of collegial coaching, however, requires various skills, which should be trained, as they do not emerge over night, but require constant practice.

Indeed, schools can do quite a lot to make the whole peer observation process work successfully. Joice and Showers (1995) emphasise the importance of strong leadership, which would eventually make the collaboration among colleagues and the development of collegial culture possible in schools. First and foremost, schools should offer teachers various trainings and workshops in order to become competent enough to carry out classroom observations as well as pre- and post-observation discussions. There are several possibilities for schools to contribute to the effectiveness of formative assessment among peers. For instance, schools can develop clear expectations for teaching effectiveness, sponsor the process to support teaching skill development, structure opportunities for confidential peer feedback and organise substitutes, to name a few (Roberson & Franchini 2008, Dos Santos 2017).

It is obvious that in order to promote collegiality and make the system of peer coaching function in schools, a number of obstacles have to be surpassed. In addition to the problems presented above, one of the biggest problems regarding the implementation of collegial

coaching is a matter of time. Due to teachers' busy schedules, it might be difficult to find common time to practise peer observation as well as teachers might be afraid of initiating the latter not to sound too intrusive (Vidmar 2006, Dos Santos 2017). Berg and Thijs (2002: 58) add that in addition to the aforementioned problems, many teachers often tend to focus on "general teaching issues" during classroom observation, although the focus should be addressed into "integrating new skills and strategies in classroom practice". In other words, the purpose should be to gain fresh ideas and new skills from the observation process, which would in the end lead to professional growth in one's teaching practice.

In conclusion, the present chapter has attempted to raise awareness of the concept of collegial coaching and its ways of implementation in the school setting, explain various observation tools that could be used during class observation and discuss the limitations of the professional development strategy, offering suggestions how to overcome them. The following chapter will introduce the participants, data and methodology as well as describe the procedure of the present survey, provide an analysis of the results and a discussion on the most important findings.

CHAPTER II

Although peer observation is seen as a positive means to improve one's teaching practice, a number of teachers may find it a rather stressful experience when being observed by a colleague. Teachers are not only afraid of receiving negative feedback, but eventually worry about losing their job as well. Stemmed from the reasons above, the goal of the present chapter is to find answers to the research questions as follows:

- 1) What are English teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation?
- 2) What are English teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating in the peer observation process?

2.1. Participants and Data

As was already mentioned beforehand, the aim of the present paper is to identify English teachers' perceptions about peer observation as a means to support one's professional growth. For that, four English teachers, who were selected because of their convenient accessibility in one school in Lääne-Virumaa County in Estonia, agreed to participate in the study during the period of November 2017 – January 2018. All the four participants of the study are female, having a teaching experience of English from 3 to 24 years. In order to assure confidentiality, the participants are not identified, but referred to as participant A, B, C and D and the individual subjects remain anonymous throughout the study. The following table (Table 1) provides additional information about the participants.

Participants	Age	Years of teaching experience
Participant A	52	24
Participant B	37	14
Participant C	38	3
Participant D	35	15

Table 1. Data of the participants.

As for the data collection, a semi-structured group interview was carried out before the collegial coaching as well as two pair interviews were held after the peer observation process. Semi-structured interview was favoured over structured or unstructured interview due to the fact that it is considered to be “the most preferred type of interview /.../ in which a great amount of data can be elicited from the interviewee” (Zohrabi 2013:256). The questions of the interviews (see Appendix 2) were derived from the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, namely the ideas of Vidmar (2006) and Roberson and Franchini (2009) were taken into consideration. In addition to the open-ended questionnaires and interviews, the author of the present thesis took part in both pairs’ lesson observations as well.

2.2. Methodology

The qualitative analysis was compiled by relying on similar studies by Adriana Castañeda-Londoño (2017) and Shields (2007) and was carried out using the principles of action research. According to Burns (2010: 2) “action research (AR) involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts” and is carried out following the stages of planning, action, observation, reflection. In order to find out about teachers’ fears, worries and their ideas about collegial coaching, a group interview was held before the peer observation process. The main reason for the latter was to reduce the

aforementioned fears and worries and emphasise the fact that the aim of collegial coaching is not to evaluate one's colleague's teaching; on the contrary, the goal is to support one's co-workers and give advice and gain new knowledge and ideas from each other. As peer observation as a strategy to improve one's teaching practice was unknown to the participants, the author of the thesis presented a short introduction into the class observation process to the teachers as well as additional materials and guidelines on collegial coaching were designed and provided (see Appendix 1). To be more exact, guidelines on the concept of the process of collegial coaching were compiled relying on previous studies (Costa & Garmston 1994, Slater & Simmons 2001, Thijs & Berg 2002, Stoller 2003, Vidmar 2006, Roberson & Franchini 2008, Murray 2010, Eri 2014) in the field.

Due to the participants' wishes, the interviews were carried out in Estonian. The conversations were recorded with the permission of the participants and fully transcribed. The data of the research was analysed using inductive content analysis. For that, a web-based qualitative analysis software program *QCAmap* (Qualitative Content Analysis map) was used that enables to select relevant text segments, passages, sentences or phrases in order to assign evaluative codes for the latter ones. Firstly, the three transcribed interviews were uploaded in the program *QCAmap* and re-read repeatedly in order to select suitable units of meaning. Secondly, during the process of open coding, the most relevant information that was in connection with the present thesis was identified and coded. Finally, the codes were categorised by analysing and simplifying the data and grouped under main and subcategories (Elo & Kyngäs 2008).

In order to increase the trustworthiness of the content analysis and its interpretation, another coder was involved with the procedure of open coding (Elo et al. 2014). The co-coder

of the present research is a doctoral student of Educational Sciences in the University of Tartu who has been using qualitative data analysis in all her studies. In order to review the data before the discussion, the codebooks were exchanged via Skype. In addition to that, the meeting between the author of the present thesis and the co-coder took place via Skype. During the discussion, the codes were compared and discussed one at a time in order to identify any areas of disagreement and ensure common understanding to establish the credibility. The discussion revealed that the codes identified by the author of the thesis and the co-coder coincided in most cases, minor differences appeared to be in wording. In addition to that, the internal validity procedure, namely member check, was practised with all the respondents. According to the aforementioned procedure, the participants read through the final interpretations of the interviews in order to confirm their validity (Zohrabi 2013).

2.3. Procedure

In order to understand the stages of the procedure of the study better, the following figure (Figure 3) is presented below.

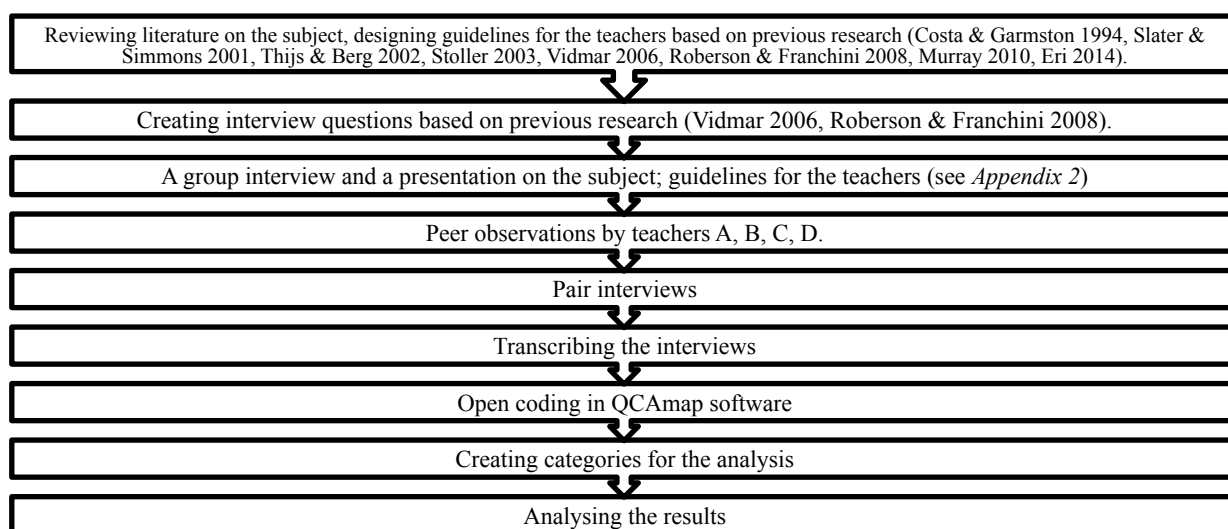


Figure 3. The procedure of the study.

The observation process was carried out during the period of November 2017 – January 2018. The participants were working in pairs, i.e. Teacher A was observing Teacher B and Teacher B was visiting Teacher A's classes; Teacher C and D paired up and followed the same system as teachers A and B. Each participant had a chance to act as an instructor as well as a coach in order to practise the process of collegial coaching. Supportive observation forms were provided beforehand during the group interview (see Appendix 2). Each teacher attended two of their co-worker's lessons and was the observer in two of their colleague's classes, as only one classroom visit may not provide the participants with the objective perceptions about peer observation. After each class visit the colleagues agreed upon a post-observation meeting in order to discuss the lesson being observed and provided and received constructive criticism. When each participant had had a chance to be an observer as well as an observee, pair interviews were held in order to find out about teachers' perceptions about collegial coaching after participating in the process. The author of the present thesis took part in each pair's pre-observation meeting, classroom observation and post-observation discussion in order to give instructions and ask questions to help to carry out the meeting (e.g. "B, what would you like A to pay special attention to while observing your lesson?", "A, what are the aspects that you especially liked at the lesson that you have observed?" etc.).

Analysing and comparing the answers of the interviewees showed how teachers' perceptions about collegial coaching changed after participating in the peer-observation

process and whether the participants would consider such a professional development strategy worth practicing in their future teaching practices.

2.4. Results

In the following section, the results of the data analysis are presented. In order to understand the division of categories and subcategories that emerged during the coding process better, they are presented in figures (Figure 4 and 5). In addition to that, authentic citations that are the most representative of the research findings are translated into English and provided in order to confirm and support the results of the survey.

2.4.1. English teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation

The present subsection gives an overview of the research question “What are English teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation?”. The following figure (Figure 4) shows the division of categories as well as subcategories that were formed during the data analysis.

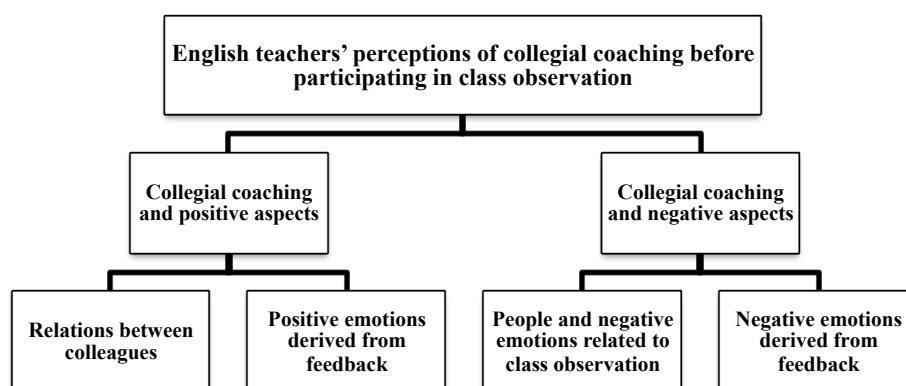


Figure 4. English teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation.

2.4.1.1. Collegial coaching and positive aspects

To begin with, the results of the survey revealed that positive aspects in relation to peer observation are split into two subcategories: 1) relations between colleagues and 2) positive emotions derived from feedback (see Figure 4).

1) Relations between colleagues. Firstly, the topic of relations between colleagues was discussed in three aspects: the positive impact of mentoring relationship, the importance of trust as well as positive relations after classroom observation.

Mentoring relationship and its positive impact. A few participants of the survey had experienced lesson observation in connection with mentoring. Thus, from the teachers' perspective, it is much easier and stress-free to be in the role of a mentor than taking part in the peer observation process. The reason of their preferences lies in the certainty that in case of mentoring, an observer and an observee both are aware of the fact that the aim of the observer is to learn from his/her mentor's lessons in order to improve his/her own instructional skills. For this reason, both parts do not feel the fear for providing or receiving feedback.

But I think that it depends on the situation. When I think back to the time when I had to mentor X and I actually asked her repeatedly to come and observe my lessons...then after I had taught my lessons I felt that years of teaching experience had finally paid off. I really felt that I would have a lot to offer her. (A)

The teachers explained that if the relationship between a young teacher and a mentor is friendly and trusting, it will be easier to carry out lesson observations without negative emotions following. Moreover, the participants were of the opinion that positive relationship between a mentor and a novice teacher not only makes the process of classroom observation easier, but enables both parties to learn and improve their teaching as well.

I don't remember that precisely, if...but I know that we had a discussion and I have learned a lot from her. Not with the couple of lessons when she observed me and I

observed her but basically from her as a young colleague... I have received a lot from her.(A)

In sum, the interviewees declared that teacher-to-teacher collaboration on that level supports teachers' professional teaching practice as well.

Trust is important. The participants of the survey stated that peer observation should be confidential in nature. Furthermore, the teachers emphasised the importance of trust being the basis of any successful relationship.

Positive relations after class observation. A few participants noted that their earlier experiences in connection with lesson observation had more likely a positive impact on the relationship with the observer. Additionally, they even added that the relationship after lesson observation turned out to be more open and free. Thus, the participants of the survey were of the opinion that collegial coaching as a strategy could affect collaboration among colleagues in a positive way.

2) Positive emotions derived from feedback. Secondly, positive emotions and feedback were analysed in connection with the following four topics: receiving no feedback caused positive feelings, feedback is not seen as criticism, feedback is seen as support and feedback is put into practice.

No feedback caused positive feelings. When interviewing the participants of the survey, it turned out that the situation where the instructor received no feedback was not considered bad at all. One teacher had had a similar experience.

I think I was pleased that I didn't get any feedback. Otherwise I would have been insecure for a long time.(A)

The teachers explained that receiving no feedback after classroom observation cannot affect them and their teaching in any way. In addition to that, the participants' perceptions revealed

the reason behind the positive aspect of gaining no feedback, as it was more likely associated with criticism.

Feedback is not seen as criticism. According to one participant, a young teacher is more receptive to feedback and sees more learning and personal development opportunities from the latter than a senior teacher who has years of teaching experience and any kind of collegial advice may sound as a critical remark.

As I've been working as a teacher very little time, then in my case, the possibility that I won't take feedback as criticism is rather big. If I had 20 years of teaching experience, I'd probably think – "you tell me how to teach?". (C)

Furthermore, the interviewee explained that a young teacher most certainly expects an experienced colleague to provide him/her constructive feedback as it supports his/her teaching practice.

Sees feedback as support. The results of the survey revealed that although feedback is rather often taken as criticism, the interviewees' perceptions in relation to receiving feedback in the process of peer observation associated with positive feedback.

Well, knowing myself, I tend to take everything very personally. But if we talk things over before the process, discuss the goals and agree on the aspects the colleague is going to pay attention to during observation, I'd probably try to dispose myself towards the idea that the feedback I'm going to receive is not negative. (D)

In addition to that, two teachers associated collegial feedback with the possibility to gain new and fresh ideas and thus the feedback to be received from the peer observation process was seen as the supportive one that promoted teachers' professional development.

Feedback is put into practice. The teachers of the survey were of the opinion that teachers' instructional skills improve only if they put the feedback they receive into practice.

In that sense, I felt that I tried to act according to her suggestions afterwards. (C)

To sum up, the interpretations of the interviewees revealed that although they had no conception of the essence of collegial coaching, they still expected to gain fresh ideas from a colleague during lesson observation in order to be practised in their future classes.

2.4.1.2. Collegial coaching and negative aspects

To start with, the findings of the survey revealed that in spite of positive experiences, the teachers of the survey also found negative sides regarding lesson observation. The participants reported that although they had previously experienced class observations by the school administration or educationalists, the focus of the latter differed from the aim of peer observation to a great extent, as it was evaluative in nature. Negative aspects in connection with lesson observation were associated with two aspects: 1) people and negative emotions related to class observation as well as 2) negative emotions derived from feedback.

1) People and negative emotions related to class observation. Firstly, the perceptions of the participants revealed that collegial coaching is associated with various negative emotions regarding the observer as well as the whole observation process. Specifically, the participants discussed anxiety and discomfort in connection with the observer, negative relations with the observer and the certainty that students act differently during lesson observation.

Anxiety and discomfort in connection with the observer. The findings of the survey revealed that the participants' fear in relation to lesson observation had often caused a situation where teachers felt that they had lost the skill to set the goals, create and carry out a lesson plan.

Well, it causes anxiety and the feeling that I haven't taught any lessons before and if I start preparing a class, then I'll have a feeling that I CAN'T DO anything. (A)

Apart from that, the teachers explained that classroom observation causes anxiety derived from the presence of the observer, as it is not clear whether the teaching strategies of the observer coincide with the teaching style of the observee as well as what the observer thinks of the instructor as a teacher in general.

Anyway, you still wonder what other people think of you and whether the observer and you have the same principles in teaching. There are so many teaching styles and each teacher teaches in a different way. So, what is important?/.../ You don't know whether the observer's opinion of you is positive or negative. (D)

In addition to that, the participants held the view that the level of anxiety depends on the colleague who comes to conduct the observation. If the observer as a person is pleasant, it is less intimidating than a colleague whose company causes inconvenience.

Then I think I'd feel so anxious that I might forget.../.../If I had an oral activity and I had to ask students some complementary questions, I think it would block my mind. I think that this kind of situation could easily happen to me. (B)

Moreover, the participants noted that fear and anxiety increases teachers' doubts regarding their competence and sufficiency and although they may have prepared their lessons with care, a teacher might break under pressure and the whole lesson may fail. In addition to the aforementioned aspects, the interviewees emphasised the certainty that in case of a colleague observing one's lesson, it is clear that he/she might learn from one's classes. School administration, however, has a completely different focus in mind, as their aim is to evaluate the teacher as an instructor not to gain new ideas from the observee's lessons. To sum up, the teachers of the survey are frightened of the situation where they are observed and evaluated in relation to their competence.

Negative relations with the observer. One of the concerns of the participants regarding lesson observation was the fact that after the observation process the relations between an observer and an observee may not be the same anymore.

/.../ I kept her at a distance for many years. (B)

Thus, the findings of the research exposed that one unpleasant experience may ruin the relationship between colleagues for several years and it may take a long time to restore the latter.

Students act differently during lesson observation. According to the findings of the group interview, it can be noted that not only an observer is the cause of fear for the observees but students' unconventional behaviour may raise the level of anxiety for the teachers as well. Namely, students may not act during the lesson observation process the same way as they are used to on a daily basis. Moreover, the participants pointed out that students, who under familiar conditions may be active speakers in classes, might take the role of a passive participator and instead of having a discussion with the teacher as usual, keep silent and watch and see what the teacher does or says. The situation described beforehand would according to the participants' perceptions also cause anxiety and uncertainty in connection with the observer.

2) Negative emotions derived from feedback. Secondly, in addition to unpleasant emotions regarding people and the observation process, the study also revealed that the most stressful and frustrating aspect of lesson observation is receiving or providing feedback. The topics discussed in connection with the latter are the following: providing feedback is difficult, feedback causes insecurity and additional questions, the comparison to a colleague is demotivating and there is less to learn from teachers from different subject sections.

Providing feedback is difficult. The participants of the survey found it to be difficult to provide a colleague with effective and meaningful feedback if the lesson did not achieve its goals.

But when I think how I provided her feedback, then I did it very carefully and implicitly and I would have wanted to say so much more, but I still...(A)

Precisely, the interviewees explained that teachers are afraid to provide a colleague with constructive criticism as they neither want to insult a colleague, hurt anybody's feelings nor cause inconvenience.

I didn't want to do it. For her sake and for mine as well and I started to think....I saw, for example, what she had spent so much time on and on the contrary, where I never spend so much time on. (A)

In conclusion, the perceptions of the participants revealed that fear of hurting a colleague's feelings with feedback causes anxiety towards the whole peer observation process.

Insecurity and additional questions. According to the results of the survey, feedback that is neither constructive nor meaningful as well as is laconic in nature makes teachers not only doubt their professional competence but question their practices as well.

There was nothing encouraging. I didn't get....well, I was just left the question up in the air whether I was suitable for my profession or not....so in that sense I can't remember anything positive. (B)

All in all, the teachers in the survey noted that if the provided feedback stays poor as well superficial, it lays the groundwork for numerous additional questions regarding teacher's instructional skills.

The comparison to a colleague is demotivating. The interviewees were of the opinion that peer observation would have a negative effect if the observer began to compare the observee with another colleague. One participant in the survey had experienced a similar situation.

/.../ she compared me to another colleague who had started her teaching career on that same year. The observer told me that she had written more words on the blackboard than me. (B)

The teacher emphasised the fact that feedback as such was not only offensive but inhibited her professional growth as well.

Less to learn from teachers from different subject sections. The participants of the survey were of the opinion that there is not much to learn from a colleague who is from a different subject section, as he/she cannot provide meaningful feedback without knowing the nuances of a particular subject. Furthermore, one participant in the survey gave an example of a teacher who was a member of the school administration and who had neither English teaching background nor experience. Due to the absence of the latter, she was not able to provide any subject-centred feedback. For this reason, the interviewees found it to be demotivating if the feedback gained during the post-observation process was neither constructive nor subject-centred, as it would not support the improvement of one's teaching practice.

2.4.2. English teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating in the peer observation process

After participating in the collegial coaching process, the author of the thesis carried out two pair interviews that aimed to find out what teachers' perceptions in regard to peer observation after they had participated in the process were. The present subsection gives an overview of the results of the data analysis answering the second research question – What are English teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating in the peer observation process? The following figure (Figure 5) presents the categories as well as subcategories that emerged during the inductive content analysis.

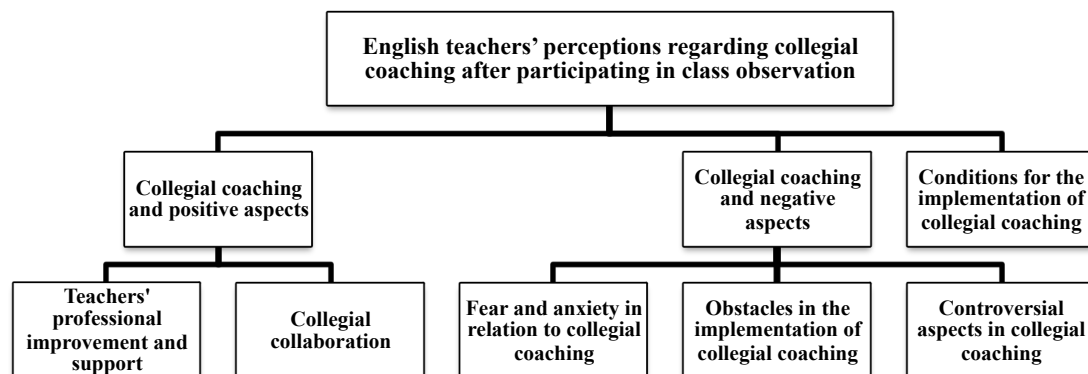


Figure 5. Teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating in the peer observation process.

2.4.2.1. Collegial coaching and positive aspects

According to the participants of the survey, peer observation as a process triggered a number of positive emotions. To be more exact, the two main areas where the positive impact was noticeable incorporated 1) teachers' professional improvement and support as well as 2) collaboration among colleagues.

1) Teachers' professional improvement and support. According to the participants in the survey, collegial coaching, as a strategy to improve one's pedagogical practice supports teachers' professional development. Furthermore, professional improvement and support were discussed in connection with the following topics: feedback provides confirmation, enriches the baggage of experience, supports self-development and helps to prevent burnout.

Feedback provides confirmation. The teachers agreed on the matter that positive and constructive feedback not only supported their professional improvement, but also confirmed the rightness of their teaching styles as well as helped to raise their self-esteem. In other words, the process of collegial coaching supported the participants to overcome the feeling of

insecurity and replaced it with self-confidence instead. Furthermore, the interviewees emphasised the positive aspect of receiving constructive criticism as it proved their teaching to be effective as well.

/.../and you'll get more power to do things...when you are on your own, you do your thing and you even don't know how or what...so, it comes in handy, I think, for everybody. (D)

Feedback enriches the baggage of experience. The teachers in the survey noted that learning from others helped to generate new ideas and forge new connections that could be implemented in their teaching practice. Moreover, the interviewees emphasised the fact that as teachers they must have a common goal and that is to create a positive and supportive learning and teaching environment where not only students but teachers feel pleased as well.

Well, the feedback I received was predominantly positive. The suggestions that were provided by my colleague, well, I thought about those things and I can definitely put them into practice in my future classes.(B)

In conclusion, the participants affirmed the need for lesson observation and constructive feedback as new ideas on how to teach a lesson or a certain topic more efficiently will definitely enhance teachers' instructional skills.

Feedback supports self-development. As for the professional growth, the findings of the survey revealed that collegial coaching fosters improvement in teachers' pedagogical practices as the process directs attention to the bottlenecks that a teacher can resolve and develop in order to make teaching and learning more effective. Furthermore, the participants held the view that peer observation does not let teachers stay inside their comfort zone, but forces them to make efforts in order to develop their competence in subject knowledge and methodology as well as improve their communication skills to be qualified enough for today's constantly evolving world. In addition to that, one participant in the survey admitted that peer observation

enables teachers to write their annual self-assessment reports, explaining that all kind of practical experience is much more effective than a theoretical one.

It's easier for me to analyse and interpret my work if I have gained feedback from my colleagues. Including the feedback, that contains suggestions to make changes in my teaching practice. (B)

The teacher was of the opinion that collegial collaboration as such will support her in writing an objective self-analysis.

Feedback helps to prevent burnout. In addition to the fact that collegial coaching stimulates professional development, the participants of the survey found the latter to be of great help in order to avoid teachers from burning out due to their busy schedules and stressful profession.

When you have a nice and supportive colleague, then at those moments, when you start to feel burnout, you are alone with your problems and you feel that you don't have enough strength to carry on, a colleague's supportive note, positive acknowledgement or just a positive comment on how one could do their job more effectively could help to overcome the difficulties and get back one's optimism to stay in the profession. (B)

To be more exact, teachers' perceptions revealed that positive words gained during the peer observation process stimulate teachers to manage stress and proceed in their teaching practice.

2) Collegial collaboration. Additionally, the results of the survey also affirmed that in the process of peer observation, collaboration among colleagues is of great importance. According to the participants' perceptions, the latter one is analysed in terms of two aspects: the feeling of safety among colleagues as well as new collaboration plans.

Feeling of safety. First of all, the teachers in the survey were of the same opinion that participating in the collegial coaching process did not affect their collegial relationship in a negative way. On the contrary, the participants declared the latter to become even closer, emphasising the feeling of safety that increased considerably.

/.../ the feeling of safety grew towards this particular colleague even more and during that period, when we met and looked in each other's eyes, we sort of had only one topic in mind. (A)

Furthermore, the interviewees stated that participating in the process of peer observation supported the contact between the participants and fostered cooperation among colleagues.

New collaboration plans. As for the cooperation, the teachers in the survey reported that the process of collegial coaching generated new ideas for collaboration that could be practised in the future.

/.../ for example, if we could get together before September to talk about teaching ideas regarding different textbook units, what everybody plans to do in a particular unit, well, just to exchange ideas before you actually start teaching a particular topic.(B)

According to the perceptions of the teachers in the survey, the process of peer observation provided them with courage and confidence in order to undertake new collaboration plans.

2.4.2.2. Collegial coaching and negative aspects

To begin with, the perceptions of the participants of the survey revealed that despite some positive sides in connection with collegial coaching, the latter was associated with several negative aspects that can be split into three subcategories: 1) fear and anxiety in relation to collegial coaching, 2) obstacles in the implementation of collegial coaching and 3) controversial aspects in collegial coaching.

1) Fear and anxiety in relation to collegial coaching. Firstly, the reasons behind different forms of anxiety lie in fear for the professional competence, for not being competent enough to provide a colleague with constructive feedback that could be used for professional development, for receiving negative feedback, for the responsibility for the students as well as

for the insecurity that everything experienced during the collegial coaching process may not be kept confidential.

Fear for the professional competence. First of all, the interviewees stated that the process of peer observation caused anxiety due to fear for the competence in subject knowledge. In other words, the participants in the survey were afraid to make mistakes or do something wrong in front of a colleague. For this reason it was added that planning an observed lesson had been much more time-consuming and teaching the latter had caused tension and stress. Furthermore, all the participants were of the opinion that besides the matter of time during the preparation of an observed lesson, finding an observation task had taken time as well. Moreover, a serious concern of the interviewees was the fact that as teachers' teaching styles may differ to a great extent, are they capable enough to stay objective during lesson observation and suppress their perceptions regarding teaching a certain topic.

Well, it makes giving feedback more complicated. If a colleague teaches something according to one method and I, for example use a completely different technique, then having not practised my colleague's method, I can't say that he/she is doing something wrong. (D)

Fear for providing feedback. In addition to the fear discussed beforehand, the participants of the survey had also doubts regarding their competence in providing constructive criticism. Several interviewees lacked the experience as such.

As a self-critical person, I questioned whether I was competent and good enough to analyse and assess my own lesson, even in a positive way. And of course whether I'm proficient enough to assess my colleague's lesson objectively and provide feedback. (B)

Fear for negative criticism. The interviewees noted that the biggest of the fears regarding peer observation was fear for receiving negative feedback.

If you have negative experiences, then it's inevitable that you are afraid. Although years have passed you still feel that you have gone back in time and you are on that

same year where your teaching performance was evaluated and the observer said this and that. (B)

Moreover, the participants in the survey held the view that fear for negative criticism could be derived from the matter that a teacher has not experienced positive feedback.

Fear for the responsibility for the students. In addition to the difficulties examined beforehand, another form of anxiety that was discussed by the participants was fear for the responsibility for the students. Furthermore, the participants mentioned double responsibility explaining that, on the one hand, they are responsible for their own role as an instructor, on the other hand, however, they take responsibility for engaging students in the learning process, for students' acquisition of material as well as students' behaviour in the class.

Well, we as conscientious teachers are responsible for our students as well...how they act in the lesson, how they acquire the topic of the lesson etc.(A)

Fear for the breach of confidentiality. The findings of the survey revealed that another frightening matter of fact regarding peer observation is a risk that the private information shared during the process is going to be discussed among other colleagues.

2) Obstacles in the implementation of collegial coaching. Secondly, the study revealed that before the implementation of peer coaching a number of obstacles might occur. To be more exact, the complications regarding finding a suitable partner for the process and replacing lesson observation with verbal exchange of ideas and experiences emerged.

Finding a partner. The participants of the survey were of the opinion that one of the biggest obstacles in connection with the implementation of collegial coaching is to find a co-worker who not only wants to participate in the process, but can be trusted as well. Furthermore, the teachers in the survey emphasised the importance of the feeling of trust and held the view that peer observation cannot be carried out with any colleague.

Unfortunately we don't have that many colleagues who wanted to participate in the process and broaden their mind. Instead, there are colleagues who look down on others and prioritise themselves thinking 'I'm smarter than others' or 'I do more than others'. (B)

Changing the process. The findings of the survey revealed that in addition to the obstacle discussed above, another problem that hinders the implementation of peer observation is the matter when teachers' own preferences for collegial collaboration differ from the principles of collegial coaching.

I think that excitement disappears rather quickly. And to be honest, 45 minutes is quite a long time to conduct observations on a regular basis. We can tell each other orally much quicker what came out well in the lesson. We are not beginners anymore to have a need to visit each other's lessons that often and we don't have beginning teachers among colleagues who'd like to observe somebody's lessons all the time. (A)

In conclusion, according to the perceptions of some interviewees, peer observation is more useful for novice teachers than experienced ones who do not have the need to participate in the collegial coaching process that often.

3) Controversial aspects in collegial coaching. Thirdly, the perceptions of the participants in the survey contained contradictions that are in conflict with the principles of collegial coaching. Specifically, the teachers reported that they had felt the need to prove themselves to their colleagues and for this reason had chosen well-working techniques for their classes. Moreover, the interviewees preferred not to take any risks regarding the observed lesson and used teaching methods they had practised before.

Make an effort for a colleague. The answers of the interviewees exposed the participants' need to make more effort for preparing and teaching a class, as they did not want to make a bad impression on their colleagues.

Well, you somehow have a habit that you have to impress others or others' opinion counts. You may be experienced and have subject knowledge and everything but you're still not sure whether you do things right from someone else's perspective. (D)

To sum it up, some of the teachers in the survey emphasised the matter that in the lesson observation situation the need to impress others is inevitable.

No risks taken. In addition to the issue regarding impressing a colleague, the study also revealed that not all the participants had taken risks in the observed lesson. In other words, some instructors had preferred an observation task that did not reveal their weaknesses.

/.../as we had a chance to choose what the coach was going to observe, then I, for instance, chose not to take any risks. So, I didn't show the observer my weak spots.(A)

All in all, some participants in the survey had a preference for only emphasising their strengths.

2.4.2.3. Conditions for the implementation of collegial coaching

First of all, the findings of the survey affirmed that collegial coaching can be effectively practised if favourable conditions are created. Furthermore, the interviewees were of the opinion that it is necessary to learn how to provide constructive feedback, be oneself during the process, find a suitable colleague who wants to collaborate in the field, think through the arrangement of the peer observation process as well as receive support from the school administration.

Workshops on feedback. The participants of the survey pointed out that providing feedback is something that should not only be learnt but practised as well. The reason of the latter lies in the fact that in that case the feedback provided in the post-observation phase would have been more constructive than it was now in the context of the present study and the participants' own efficiency factor would have been much bigger.

Be yourself. Half of the participants in the survey highlighted the importance of being oneself as the process of peer observation will be the most beneficial in that case.

Knowing the observation task. The teachers in the survey noted that knowing what the coach is going to observe in the lesson gives the instructor the feeling of confidence.

Well, in that sense, it was easier to teach the observed lessons because we could choose the observation task. It would have been much more difficult if we didn't know what the coach observed. (C)

Colleagues have to match. The teachers in the survey were of the opinion that collegial coaching can work successfully if a peer suits you as a person. Moreover, the participants highlighted the importance of matching personalities laying the groundwork for a trusting relationship.

/.../but that person should then be acceptable to you as a person as well, I mean his/her principles and...yes, he/she as a person not as a teacher.(D)

In other words, trust between colleagues helps to feel safe in the peer observation process. The latter feeling, however, lays the basis for the successful long-lasting collaboration among peers.

The arrangement of the process. According to the interviewees, collegial coaching as a professional growth strategy can work if the whole process is well organised and the participants have frequent contact throughout the process. In addition to that, the findings revealed that multiple peer observation not only helped to lose fears, but the whole atmosphere turned out to be more relaxed. Furthermore, the participants of the survey declared collegial coaching to be successful when being consistent in nature.

/.../Yes, exactly, I definitely had a positive feeling regarding the whole process and now I think if I had to practise it again with the same colleague, I'd be much more relaxed.(C)

As for the participation in the process, the interviewees were of the opinion that due to teachers' busy schedules, peer observation could be practised once a trimester.

The support of school administration. The findings of the survey revealed that in order to promote collegial collaboration, the support of the school administration is of great importance.

Then it should be the way that there is a substitute teacher who's with your class the whole time. You don't have to look for the substitutes yourself but school administration has arranged the whole thing /.../(C)

Moreover, the participants noted that if collegial coaching was a natural part of school life and it was more approved and appreciated by the administration, it would encourage more teachers to participate in the peer observation process as well.

2.5. Discussion

The aim of the present thesis was to find out what English teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching before and after participating in the peer observation process were. In the following section, the most important, thought-provoking and controversial aspects of the results of the survey are taken under discussion.

To begin with, in the context of the first research question the findings of the research asserted that collegial coaching was associated with positive and negative aspects. As for the positive aspects, the teachers of English described the positive impact derived from the relations between colleagues as well as from positive feedback. In addition to that, the participants of the survey emphasised the importance of trust in relation to peer observation, being one of the most vital components in order for the collegial collaboration to be successful. The atmosphere of mutual trust in the process of collegial coaching is also highlighted by Vidmar (2006), who claims that the latter lays the groundwork for the open and supportive relationship among peers. The author of the present thesis is also of the opinion that

confidential relationship among colleagues creates opportunities for not only lesson observations but peer discussions to be effective and professionally beneficial as well. With reference to feedback in connection with positive emotions, some teachers noted that the feedback they had gained from their previous lesson observation experiences was more taken as friendly advice than seen as criticism. The present finding of the survey is in correlation with the teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation in Castañeda-Londoño's (2017) research where most of the participants had seen feedback as an opportunity for learning. Nevertheless, a rather thought-provoking finding of the present survey was the certainty that receiving no feedback was associated with positive emotions. On the one hand, the latter is understandable, as in that case it cannot affect a teacher and his/her self-esteem, on the other hand, however, it shows teachers' insecurity regarding any kind of feedback. Furthermore, feedback is seen as a threat to a teacher's professional identity (Castañeda-Londoño 2017).

In light of the negative aspects, the participants described their previous experiences in the field of lesson observation where the main emphasis had been on the evaluation of teachers' qualification, i.e. whether they qualified for their profession or not. Moreover, as the aforementioned situation is a clear example of the imbalanced power relationship between a teacher and school authority, it is clear that the aim of the administration is not to learn from the lesson but to evaluate and judge the latter instead. The feedback, however, a teacher expects to gain, may not always be professionally supportive. From the reasons discussed above, the author of the present thesis finds it understandable why from the English teachers' perspective, lesson observations carried out by the school authority were associated with fear and anxiety and why relations between a teacher and school administration may stay distant

for years. Furthermore, previous studies also revealed that class observations conducted by school authority are associated with tension and anxiety (Crookes 2003).

On the other hand, however, the participants described their negative experiences in relation to providing and receiving feedback. Surprisingly, according to the English teachers' perceptions, there is less to learn from teachers from different subject sections than English. Similarly, the findings of the survey by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) also reveal that teachers prefer observers who are familiar with the subject. That sort of thinking, however, can be explained with teachers' limited knowledge regarding the concept of collegial coaching. Contrary to the English teachers' perceptions, Roberson and Franchini (2008) highlight that it is not compulsory for the observer to be from the same subject section as the instructor but he/she can come from a different one as well. Indeed, the author of the thesis shares Roberson and Franchini's (2008) opinion and believes that teachers from other subject sections can support English teachers' professional growth and the latter needs not to be only subject-centred, but can incorporate other spheres of teaching like classroom management, interactions etc. as well. However, the author of the thesis is of the opinion that in order to conduct lesson observations effectively, a teacher from another subject section should speak and understand English. Additionally, the aim of peer observation is to not only assess the teaching itself, but analyse the layers of teaching in a more detailed way in order to develop deeper understandings of effective teaching as well as cause reflection at a deeper level (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005).

In the context of the second research question, English teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating in the peer observation process became evident. Let us remind that before the peer observation experience the participants had either had only

positive or negative emotions in relation to lesson observation. After the process, however, alongside positive and negative feelings, a number of other perceptions emerged.

First of all, in connection with positive aspects, the participants of the survey emphasised the positive impact of feedback on teachers' self-development. Previous studies (Arredondo & Delany 1998, Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005, Donnelly 2007, Shields 2007, Lasagabaster & Sierra's 2011, Day 2013, Castañeda-Londoño 2017) also claim that peer observation helps to foster improvement in teachers' pedagogical practices. Moreover, the participants of the present survey highlighted the importance of constructive feedback implying on the certainty that the latter supported their self-reflection as well. Similarly, previous studies (Arredondo & Delany 1998, Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005, Donnelly 2007, Shields 2007, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2011, Day 2013, Castañeda-Londoño 2017) in the field confirm that constructively provided feedback encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching and become more analytical and self-directed in order to modify their professional practices. Apart from this, another interesting finding of the present survey regarding positive aspects was the fact that collegial coaching helps to avoid burnout. The feeling of burnout in connection with professional frustration and the reasons that lead to the latter has been discussed by other researchers (Ali Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikahmadi 2016) as well.

As for the negative aspects, fear and anxiety in relation to peer observation were emphasised. Moreover, observation tension and nervousness are the components that are also discussed in previous studies (Gebhard & Oprandy 1999, Aubusson et al. 2007, Borich 2008, Lasagabaster & Sierra 2011, Castañeda-Londoño 2017, Dos Santos 2017). It is understandable that tension is first and foremost caused by fear for the observer, who after peer observation

might start questioning whether the instructor is pedagogically competent enough for his/her profession (Borich 2008). Apart from that, providing feedback and receiving negative criticism was another area of concern for the English teachers. Similarly, the lecturers' perceptions in Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond's (2005) research reveal that on the one hand, in case of providing feedback, the reaction of the observee was feared, on the other hand, however, constructive feedback was associated with criticism. The reason why providing feedback causes difficulties, lies in teachers' inexperience. In other words, teachers lack skills and directions on how to provide constructive feedback to a peer (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005). Thus, in order for peer observation to become a meaningful process, giving feedback effectively needs to be learnt and practised.

As for the constructive feedback being equalised with criticism, there can be several explanations. On the one hand, the reason may lie in teachers' previous negative experiences regarding lesson observation, on the other hand, however, it may be related to human nature in general – everything is taken too personally. In order for the teacher to be able to see feedback more than criticism, the former has to understand what the essence of collegial coaching is before participating in the process. Furthermore, the aim of peer observation is not to criticise teachers and/or their performance, but enable them to analyse and reflect on their teaching in order to improve their pedagogical practices (Murray 2010).

In addition to the aforementioned negative emotions, the study revealed a number of obstacles that may eventually hinder the implementation of collegial coaching. On the one hand, the participants emphasised the problem regarding finding a suitable partner who would not only be interested in participating in the process, but could be trusted as well. Indeed, it is understandable that peer observation cannot be practised with any colleague due to the

incompatibility of personalities. Moreover, the important matter of peers' compatible characters is highlighted by Vidmar (2006) who declares that in order the process of collegial coaching to be non-threatening, teachers' personality types have to match. On the other hand, however, the present study revealed a rather thought-provoking finding, which lets the author of the thesis assume that the participants' perceptions in connection with the concept of collegial coaching stayed somewhat superficial. Specifically, the English teachers of the survey found verbal exchange of experiences among colleagues to be more effective than the process of peer observation, not to mention that constant lesson observation may according to the participants eventually become boring due to lack of new ideas to discover.

In the same vein, Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) discuss in their survey on teachers' limited interpretations in relation to collegial coaching. To be more exact, the results of their study reveal that the lecturers of the survey had only learned from the classes where they had gained new ideas and techniques for their future lectures. Undeniably, one of the values of collegial coaching is mutual learning (Vidmar 2006). However, the latter involves not only collecting new teaching ideas and methods but an in-depth self-reflection that supports professional development and in the end improves student learning as well (Goddard & Goddard 2007, Murray 2010, Supovitz et al 2010). In regard to the present survey, verbal exchange of teaching experiences can clearly support teachers in covering certain topics, however, the viewpoint as such does not support teachers' professional development as a whole, because it lacks personal approach where a teacher's individual needs are taken into consideration as well. In addition to that, some participants believed collegial coaching to be more useful for novice teachers than experienced ones. Naturally, peer observation as a means to enhance pedagogical practice is extremely beneficial for novice teachers (Day 2013), on the

other hand, however, in the context of lifelong learning, it is not only novice teachers' obligation but seniors' as well to constantly improve oneself in order to be qualified enough for their profession. Therefore, peer observation not only provides opportunities to build collaborative culture that in the long perspective has a huge impact on teachers' professional growth but helps to surpass professional frustration and loneliness by bringing teachers out of isolation as well (Gosling 2002, Murray 2010).

The participants' perceptions revealed several aspects that were in contradiction with the concept of peer observation. First of all, the English teachers noted that participating in collegial coaching had made them put a lot more effort on planning the lesson and teaching, as they were afraid to fail in front of the observer. The purpose of peer observation, however, is not to impress someone, on the contrary, the aim is to reflect upon one's own teaching, to share ideas, new insights and through that encourage teacher's on-going professional development (Slater & Simmons 2001). In addition to that, several teachers claimed to have practised only techniques they knew worked on students and for this reason took no risks regarding new methodology. On the one hand, it is somewhat understandable, as previously tested techniques not only give confidence but help to avoid negative performance (Day 2013). Nevertheless, collegial coaching aims at encouraging teachers to identify their bottlenecks, overcome them and practise new styles of teaching in order to foster improvement in one's teaching practice (Berg & Thijs 2002). It can be assumed that the participants acted this way because they were relatively new to this form of collegial coaching. It is possible that if they had practised it more, they would become more familiar with the system, would form a more trusting relationship with the colleague, would dare to show and discuss problematic aspects of their teaching as well as would experiment more.

Apart from this, the participants of the survey also discussed the conditions necessary for the implementation of collegial coaching stating that the latter could be effective and beneficial if providing feedback was taught prior the observation process, teachers stayed themselves and one could find a reliable partner to conduct observations consistently. Providing constructive feedback is certainly one of the most important skills regarding peer observation and it is obvious that teachers need guidance and workshops to practise and learn how to give candid feedback that affected a colleague in a beneficial way. Furthermore, Gün (2011) also highlights that the skill of reflection must be trained in order the feedback to not be just the paraphrase of the observed lesson but the reflection of a teacher's performance instead. In addition to that, the participants of the survey emphasised the importance of the support of the school authority. Indeed, the support of the latter by laying down a clear observation structure, offering trainings regarding collegial coaching, reflection and feedback as well as organising substitutes for the teachers would leave more time for the participants to focus on the peer observation process itself (Roberson & Franchini 2008; Dos Santos 2017). Moreover, due to teachers' busy schedules they lack time regarding the implementation of peer observation. The latter, however, was emphasised by the participants of the survey as well, claiming that they literally do not have time to conduct observations more than three times a school year. As was mentioned beforehand, in order to overcome the problem in relation to time, school administration could arrange substitutes for the teachers (Roberson & Franchini 2008).

Taking the aspects discussed beforehand into account, collegial collaboration contributes to teachers' continuous professional improvement and overall development of collegial culture at schools that results in better student learning outcomes as well.

CONCLUSION

To start with, in order the school culture to be effective and learner-centred not only bearing students' needs in mind but teachers' as well, collegial collaboration plays a remarkable role. One of the productive strategies to promote collegial collaboration in the school setting is to practise collegial coaching. The latter is defined as a reciprocal process, which enables peers to conduct lesson observations in order to exchange ideas, share critical reflections regarding classroom practice in a constructive, non-evaluative and non-judgmental way as well as learn from the observation process to enhance teaching and facilitate change in teacher's professional growth (Vidmar 2006).

Previous studies in relation to collegial coaching reveal that well-organised peer observation process not only helps teachers become self-directed and self-reflective learners but has a significant impact on teachers' professional development as well (Arredondo & Delany 1998, Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond 2005, Donnelly 2007, Shields 2007, Lasagabaster & Sierra's 2011, Day 2013, Castañeda-Londoño 2017). Moreover, previous research shows that teachers' improved instructional skills affect students and their learning outcomes in a positive way (Goddard & Goddard 2007, Murray 2010, Supovitz et al 2010).

The aim of the present thesis was to identify English teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching as a means to support one's professional teaching practice. In order to investigate teachers' perceptions in the field, a method of action research was carried out among two pairs of female English teachers whose English teaching experience ranged from 3 till 24 years. The results of the study were analysed following the principles of inductive content analysis. The two research questions under inquiry were as follows:

- 1) What are English teachers' perceptions of collegial coaching before participating in class observation?
- 2) What are English teachers' perceptions regarding collegial coaching after participating in the peer observation process?

The most important findings of the present thesis indicate that teachers have little or no experience in relation to collegial coaching and the latter is mostly associated with fear and anxiety. On the one hand, the reasons behind the fear and anxiety were in connection with the observer. To be more exact, the participants questioned their pedagogical competence and subject knowledge as well as feared constructive feedback to be criticism instead. In order to avoid negative remarks, teachers' focus regarding the process of collegial coaching somewhat changed, i.e. instead of taking risks and trying new teaching methods, the teachers' focal point lied in impressing the observer. The aforementioned aspect, however, does not correspond to the principles of collegial coaching, as the aim of the latter is not to concentrate on the observer but oneself and one's professional development. On the other hand, however, due to teachers' inexperience, providing constructive feedback turned out to be problematic as well. Therefore, the findings of the survey emphasise the importance of the support of the school authority that can organise trainings and workshops regarding reflection as well as giving and receiving feedback. In addition to the aforementioned findings, another important discovery was the fact that not only the power relationship among peers must be balanced, but relations between colleagues have to be based on trust and mutual respect.

All in all, the results of the findings revealed that although teachers feel anxious about lesson observations, they nevertheless see it as a tool to support self-development. Furthermore, in order for the teachers to implement collegial coaching on a regular basis, the

latter must be first and foremost accepted as a part of school culture.

The present thesis has several limitations. First of all, the author of the present thesis had neither prior experience in conducting action research nor doing qualitative data analysis. Due to the reason that the author of the present thesis had never carried out interviews, the author lacked enough competence to intervene the conversation when the interviewees diverged the subject under inquiry. In addition to that, the results of the survey may be influenced by the certainty that the number of lessons observed by the participants was too little in order to understand the process of collegial coaching in depth. Nevertheless, the findings of the present thesis can be implemented as a basis for a large-scale research in the field. Despite the fact that the results of the present thesis cannot be generalised due to the small sample of the study, the current thesis still provides important information about the implementation of collegial coaching for teachers as well as the ways how to overcome the obstacles regarding the process of peer observation for school administrations.

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Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Peer Observation

Peer observation (collegial coaching or peer review) is “a confidential relationship between professional colleagues working together to reflect on their teaching and share ideas in order to improve their professional skills”.
(Berg & Thijs 2002)

Collegial coaching is a system where “professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas, teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace”.
(Slater & Simmons 2001)

A peer-coach is a “partner who offers constructive criticism in a non-judgmental way”. (Murray 2010)

The key principles of collegial coaching are the following:

- It is non-evaluative;
- It is non-judgmental;
- It is non-threatening;
- It promotes collegiality;
- It is frequent;
- It is confidential;
- **It supports teachers’ professional improvement.**

Collaboration helps teachers **raise their self-esteem** as well as **self-confidence** in order to face challenges in their teaching practice. Moreover, the observed teacher (an instructor) as well as the observer (a coach) **both learn from each other**.

The successful process of peer observation contains 3 stages:

1. the pre-meeting conference
2. peer observation
3. the post-meeting conference

Both, the pre-meeting conference as well as the post-meeting conference could last for 10 - 15 minutes.

THE PRE-MEETING CONFERENCE

The instructor (observed teacher):

- introduces the aims and objectives of the lesson;
- explains how students will achieve the goals of the lesson;
- discusses specific concerns regarding teaching.

Here is a list of helpful questions for the coach (observer) for the planning conference:

- What is the class going to be about?
- As you teach, what will the students do?
- What would you like students to take from the session?
- What will you do to achieve your intended outcomes?
- What will you do in class? What methods and strategies will you use?
- What would you like for me to focus on when I observe?
How would you like to receive feedback from me?
(i.e., What kind of observation instrument would you prefer that I use?)

PEER OBSERVATION

During the peer observation process the observer (coach) can use various tools, which help to collect information about the observed lesson.

Here are some ideas of different observation tools:

- **Checklist** – gives an overview of different aspects of the lesson.
- **T-chart** –used to get an overview of teacher- as well as student-talking time during the lesson.
- **Seating chart** - records teacher and student questions and answers and what the teacher does during student pair work.
- **Written descriptive narrative** - provides an opportunity to focus on many nuances of the lesson or one single aspect; free in form.

THE POST-MEETING CONFERENCE

When to provide the peer-coached teacher with feedback?

It is important to leave some time for the observed teacher as well as the observer to analyse the lesson being observed. However, the sooner it happens, the better for both parts, advisably on the same day.

Helpful questions for the instructor for self-analysis before the post-meeting conference:

- What went well?
- Where did your students seem to respond positively to what you were doing?
- Where do you see evidence that you met your objectives for the class meeting? What do you wish had worked better?

What is the role of the coach?

- to be an active listener and encourage the instructor to explore and elaborate on what actually occurred in the classroom;
- to stay objective;
- to avoid negative comments and criticism;
- to discuss only the matters you and the coach agreed on prior the class visitation;
- to present data gathered or recorded on the tool during the observation process;
- to provide colleague with constructive feedback.

Don't forget that only through constructive feedback can your colleague improve his/her teaching.

Helpful questions for the coach for reflective discussion:

- What did you like about your lesson?
- What worked for you?
- How did you feel about the class?
- Was it a typical class?
- Were the objectives reached?
- What went well? What would you have liked to improve?

After the questions presented above, provide your colleague with candid and constructive feedback. Avoid criticism! Share your thoughts and ideas!

Follow-up questions for the coach to be asked from the instructor:

- What new ideas or insights did you discover about your teaching?
- As you plan future sessions, what ideas could be carried over and used?
- What has the coaching session done for you? What would you have liked to see happen in the coaching process? What could your coach do differently in future peer conferences?

Peer Observation Checklist

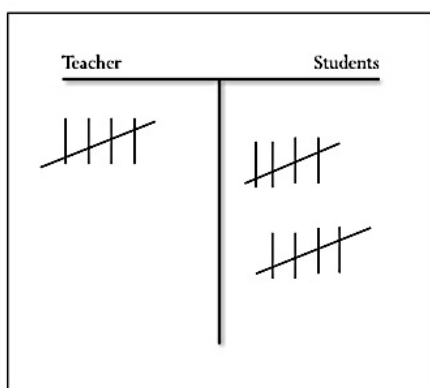
Instructor _____ **Class** _____
Observer _____ **Form** _____

		Comments
Organization	States the purpose of class session and instructional activities.	
	Presents the learning objectives.	
	States the overview of the lesson	
	Logical sequence of presentation.	
	Presents the final summary.	
Presentation	Uses a variety of activities to ensure all students are engaged and understand the material.	
	Restates important concepts	
	Uses concrete examples and illustrations that clarify the material	
	Links new materials to previously learned concepts.	
	Uses visuals and handouts to accompany verbal presentation.	
	Intonation and pacing appropriate	
	Simple and easy explanations.	
Student interaction	Students are able to connect course materials to other relevant topics.	
	Fosters student-to-student interaction.	
	Encourages student participation, engages students in discussions.	
	Students are comfortable asking questions.	
	Students actively participate in class activities and discussion.	

Eri, Rajaraman. 2014. Peer Observation of Teaching: Reflections of an Early Career Academic. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2: 9, 625-631.

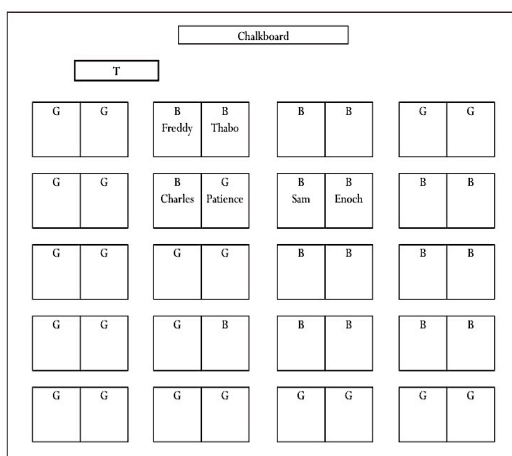
Roberson, Bill and Billie Franchini (ed). 2008. *Peer Observation and Assessment of Teaching*. New York: University at Albany.

T-Chart



- Use tally marks to record teacher-talking and student-talking time.

Seating Chart



- Put a tally mark in a student's box who is being asked, listened to or called on by the teacher during pair work.
- Put a question mark in the student's box who addresses a question to the teacher.

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Appendix 2 – Group and pair interview questions

Group interview questions before the peer observation process

- Have you experienced any kind of teacher observation during your teaching practice?
Could you elaborate on that?
- What do you think of teacher observation in general?
- How do you feel when being observed by a colleague? Why? What causes such feelings?
- Did you have any feedback after the observation process? What kind of feedback did you gain (candid, constructive, judgmental, subjective etc.)?
- How did the feedback provided by the observer affect you? What did you learn from it? How did the whole process of observation affect you in the long perspective?
- How did the process of observation affect your relationship with the observer?

Pair interview questions after the peer observation process

- How long have you been working as a teacher?
- How did you feel during the peer observation process?
- What difficulties did you experience? How can these be overcome?
- How did the feedback provided by the peer affect you? Can you use the recommendations in your further teaching practice?
- How did the process of observation affect your relationship with your colleague?
- Would you consider practicing peer observation in order to improve your teaching practice? Why? Why not?
- How often should peer observation be conducted during a school year? Why do you think so?

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Karin Sirgmets

English Teachers' Perceptions of Collegial Coaching as a Means to Foster Improvement in Pedagogical Practices

Inglise keele õpetajate arusaamad kollegiaalsest tagasisidestamisest kui pedagoogilise praktika arendamise vahendist

Magistritöö

2018

Lehekülgede arv: 69

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on uurida, millised on inglise keele õpetajate arusaamad kollegiaalsest tagasisidestamisest ja selle praktiseerimisest, toetamaks õpetajate professionaalset arengut. Töös on püstitatud järgmised uurimisküsimused: 1) Millised on õpetajate arusaamad kollegiaalsest tagasisidestamisest enne tunnivaatlusprotsessis osalemist? 2) Millised on inglise keele õpetajate arusaamad kollegiaalsest tagasisidestamisest pärast kollegiaalses tagasisidestamisprotsessis osalemist?

Antud töö koosneb sissejuhatausest, kahest peatükist ja kokkuvõttest. Töö sissejuhatavas osas selgitatakse kollegiaalse tagasisidestamise mõistet ja keskendutakse varasematele uuringutele, mis käsitlevad kollegiaalse tagasisidestamise praktiseerimist nii kooli kui ka ülikooli kontekstis. Esimene peatükk annab ülevaate kollegiaalse tagasisidestamise konseptsioonist, selgitab, kuidas viimast koolikontekstis läbi viia, tutvustab erinevaid vaatlusvahendeid, mis toetavad vaatlusprotsessi ning arutleb kollegiaalset tagasisidestamist puudutavate kitsaskohtade üle. Teises peatükis tutvustatakse valimit, uurimismeetodit ja –protseduuri, analüüsitakse uurimistulemusi ning arutletakse huvitavamate uurimistulemuste üle.

Käesolev töö on oma olemuselt kvalitatiivne tegevusuuring. Uurimuses osales 4 ühe Lääne-Virumaa kooli inglise keele õpetajat vanuses 35-52, kelle õpetamiskogemus varieerub 3 kuni 24 aastani. Andmete kogumiseks viidi läbi grüpiintervjuu enne kollegiaalse tagasisidestamise praktiseerimist ning kaks paarisintervjuud pärast õpetajate kollegiaalses tagasisidestamisprotsessis osalemist. Andmete analüüsimisel kasutati induktiivset sisuanalüüsi. Uurimusest selgus, et õpetajatel puudub kollegiaalse tagasisidestamise kogemus ja viimast seostatakse hirmu ja ärevusega. Ühelt poolt põhjustas seda vaateleja, teisalt aga õpetajate kogenematus konstruktiivset tagasisidet nii anda kui ka saada. Kuigi õpetajad seostasid tunnivaatlust pinget ja ärevusega, nägid nad pärast protsessis osalemist kollegiaalses tagasisidestamises siiski professionaalse enesearendamise võimalust. Uurimustulemused rõhutasid kooli juhtkonnapoolse toetuse tähtsust, kes saaks õpetajaid mitmel moel selles protsessis toetada, nt. koolitusi korraldada, asendusi organiseerida.

Märksõnad: kollegiaalne tagasiside, kollegiaalne koostöö, refleksioon, konstruktiivne tagasiside, professionaalne enesearendamine

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

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